

Protecting the State's Double Promise: The Ghetto Fighters' House Museum's Role in
Promoting Liberal Democratic Values in Israel
Honors Research Thesis

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Abstract:

An interdependent relationship between liberal and communitarian values rests at the heart of Israel's self-conception as a Jewish and democratic state. Its Declaration of Independence clearly outlines the state's responsibility to ensure collective rights while also equally protecting all of its citizens' individual freedoms. However, decades of war, religious and nationalistic ideologies, socialist influences, and a thick collective identity partly rooted in the traumatic memories of the Holocaust have led communitarian values to become the predominant social norm in Israeli society. Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the Holocaust, has played a major role in fomenting a common Jewish identity around the collective trauma of the Holocaust. In contrast, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum strives to promote liberal-democratic values that prioritize the individual over the collective. The museum's decentralized design, ambivalence towards displaying graphic depictions of Nazi atrocities, and multicultural educational programs all play a role in fostering an ethos of individualism. Furthermore, the museum's leitmotif of resistance is a medium through which it promotes a liberal culture of individualism that empowers the individual to stand apart from the crowd and openly denounce and resist prejudicial attitudes. One of the most influential ways the State of Israel can honor its dualistic commitment to both the individual and the collective is by bringing the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum into the mainstream of Holocaust education in order to serve as a counterbalance to Yad Vashem.

We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams;—
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems.

~ First stanza of
Arthur O'Shaughnessy's "Ode," 1874

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Introduction

Deep in the fabrics of Israeli history, society, and culture, there rests an interdependent relationship between liberal and communitarian values. Examining a key passage from Israel's Declaration of Independence¹ reveals how the rights of the individual are inextricably bound to the nature of the community and its constituent parts:

The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. ("The Declaration")

The founders of the state had difficulty determining whether the collective existed for the sake of the individual or whether the individual was subordinate to the dictates of the collective (Lahav, "Supreme Court" 63). The vocabulary used in the Declaration of Independence reflects this uncertainty. On one hand, the state's responsibility of ensuring its citizens' full social and political equality reflects a deep commitment to liberal-democratic values that prioritize the individual over the community. On the other hand, however, the document's careful wording regarding the complete "freedom of...culture" suggests that the rights of the individual are embedded within and must accommodate themselves to the broader framework of collective rights (Jacobsohn 8). As this passage demonstrates, the tension between communitarian values and individual liberties reaches the core of Israel's self-conception as a Jewish *and* democratic state.

¹ Israel does not have a formally written constitution. Thus, the rights of the individual and those of the community are bound together in very important and complicated ways that many Americans cannot appreciate since the U.S. Constitution places so much emphasis on securing and protecting individual liberties (Jacobsohn 8).

One cannot understand the complexities of the state's dualistic commitment to the individual and the collective without considering the social factors that led to the development of a thick collective Jewish identity in Israeli society. Throughout Israel's history, nationalistic ideologies and socialist influences have helped construct a thick ethos of collectivism in Israeli society that has generally overshadowed the state's obligation to protect individual liberties. As a nationalistic movement dedicated to securing the Jewish people's right to self-determination, Zionism "operated...against individualism and against the liberal conception of political and civil liberties" (Lahav, "Foundations" 211) since it always put at the top of its agenda the welfare of the Jewish collective and not necessarily that of the individual Jew. Furthermore, Israel's kibbutz movement² effectively inhibited a culture of individualism by creating a social environment in which kibbutz members were expected to suppress their private needs in order to merge their personal identities with the collective identity of the agricultural commune on which they lived (Bar-On 93; Triandis 36). Early kibbutz members were not allowed to own private property of any sort and were looked down upon as being weak or needy if they expressed their feelings about living through very harsh conditions.³ Although kibbutzim have gradually become more privatized and more accommodating to their member's material or emotional needs, their influence on Israeli society cannot be underestimated since they were regarded as one of the foremost symbol of the early

² In general, a kibbutz is a collective agricultural commune in Israel.

³ This sort of psychological repression helped produced a Spartan-like culture (Bar-On 91) that arguably is perpetuated in modern Israeli society through compulsory military service for both men and women. It is interesting to note that despite their relatively low numbers compared to the general population, kibbutz members have always been disproportionately represented in the officer's corps of the Israeli Defense Force (Ezrahi 38). One could argue that by living on these agricultural communes, kibbutz members are psychologically primed to make the transition into a military setting that regards camaraderie and group unity as two of its most important values.

Zionist movement.

Additionally, the need to overcome military threats and economic hardships fortified a collective Jewish identity. Jewish Israelis saw themselves as being surrounded by enemies and “having to struggle, physically and mentally, for [their] lives and survival. [They] could succeed only if [they] were willing to sacrifice a great deal - even [their] lives” (Bar-On 90). The siege mentality that consequently developed in Israel had drastic implications for how Jewish Israelis commemorated both the soldiers who lost their lives defending their homeland and the Jewish victims who perished in the Holocaust. In this culture of personal sacrifice, it was almost impossible to mourn for individuals without converting them into martyrs.⁴ Indeed, memorials and ceremonies that commemorated the lost generation of European Jews “were intended to give meaning to death for the sake of one's country, to justify the sacrifice, and by this means also to set the national ethos and interests above the personal life of each individual” (Zertal 21).

It was within this emerging culture of collective commemoration that the Knesset, Israel's parliament, unanimously passed the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority - Yad Vashem Law in 1953. According to the law, Yad Vashem⁵ would be established as the “State Remembrance Authority for the Holocaust and Heroism” and would be built next to Israel's the national cemetery on the western hills of Jerusalem (Auron 16). Furthermore, Article 12 stated that Yad Vashem's purpose

⁴ For a fascinating discussion of the how the Israeli government granted symbolic citizenship to Holocaust victims and, in doing so, converted them into martyrs who had seemingly given up their lives for the existence of the state, see James Young's *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, p. 244-247.

⁵ Hebrew: “A monument and a name.” The name was taken from Isaiah 56:5, which reads: “Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah).

was “to collect, examine and publish testimony of the disaster and the heroism of the Jewish people during the Holocaust and to bring home its lesson to the nation” (Auron 16). Although the law never formally articulated what the “lesson” of the Holocaust was, many would agree with Segev’s claim that even to this day, “the museum leads the visitor ‘from Holocaust to rebirth’ [and that its] message is ‘never again’” (425).

“Leading” is exactly what the museum does. Although Yad Vashem is an enormous complex that includes an art museum, a synagogue, an exhibition pavilion, and several different learning centers that visitors can freely walk to and from, its historic museum was designed to restrict visitors’ movement to a very specific “route dictated by the evolving narrative [of the Holocaust], with a beginning, middle and end” (“Holocaust History Museum”). Structure trumps agency at Yad Vashem’s historical museum as “impassable gaps extending along the breadth of the...floor...constitute a physical obstacle, guiding the visitor into the adjacent galleries” (“Holocaust History Museum”). Visitors embark on a chronological journey that begins with the everyday life of European Jews prior to World War II. Their path continues through exhibits that recount the social exclusion of Jews in Germany and Poland, the anti-Jewish policies that led to systemic discrimination and violence, the establishment of ghettos, the “Final Solution” and its implementation throughout Europe, and the emergence of resistance movements. Visitors then pass through the Hall of Names, which houses both a ten-meter high cone with approximately 600 family photographs and a circular repository with enough space to store six million biographical pages: one for each Jewish life claimed during the Holocaust. The journey finally ends on a balcony with a stunning view of western Jerusalem’s hills and forests.

It is difficult to underestimate the role that Yad Vashem plays in using the narrative of the Holocaust to solidify a collective Jewish identity. Memory of the Holocaust arguably constitutes the single most significant component of Jewish-Israeli identity today (Gross 104). All one has to do in order to understand that Yad Vashem is Israel's "best example of secular collective consciousness on the Holocaust" (Gur-Ze'ev 392) is to consider how many Jews, both Israeli and international, visit the museum. Yitzhak Arad, director of Yad Vashem throughout the 1990s, estimated that half a million Israeli students and soldiers visit Yad Vashem annually (Segev 422). Furthermore, most Taglit-Birthright Israel trips include a visit to Yad Vashem (Sasson 15). These ten-day peer group educational trips were designed to give young Jewish adults who live outside of Israel and who have never visited the country the opportunity to reconnect with their cultural and religious heritage. It seems fitting that a trip to Yad Vashem would be on almost all group itineraries since the museum is one of the foremost social institutes in the world that tries to perpetuate a monolithic Jewish identity among a people that are so widely dispersed and divided along religious, ethnic, political, linguistic, and socio-economic lines. It is at Yad Vashem that memory works to "bind present and past generations, to unify a world outlook, [and] to create a vicariously shared national experience" (Young 247) for the Jewish people. For a country whose most valuable resource may indeed be collective memory itself, Yad Vashem stands alone as a national treasure that is fused to Israel's existence as the homeland for the Jews.

In a sense, Yad Vashem is a civic center that uses the history of the Holocaust to help construct and maintain Israel's thick collective identity as a Jewish state. But what

exists on the opposite side of the coin? If Israel sees itself as a Jewish state that guarantees “complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex” (“The Declaration”), then should it not have a museum that works in tandem with Yad Vashem as a civic center, but that harnesses the affective power of the Holocaust to promote liberal-democratic values instead of communitarian ones? In order to answer this question, one must move away from the heart and center of Jerusalem and toward the peripheries of Israeli society.

Located on kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot,⁶ approximately 15 minutes south of the Lebanese border, the Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum⁷ works to restore Israel’s balance as both a Jewish and democratic state by bringing the focus back onto the individual in terms of Holocaust education. The museum offers visitors an alternative approach to learning about the Holocaust by presenting the narrative of the ghetto fighters within the framework of Jewish life and resistance⁸ before, during, and after the Holocaust. In other words, the history of the Jewish community before the war, its struggle to survive and maintain its dignity during the war, and its return to normalcy afterwards form the basis of one of the museum’s central themes: the ongoing struggle that each *individual* must endure to resist the forces of prejudice and dehumanization that helped transform the Holocaust from a nightmare into a reality.

This essay argues that the Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum counterbalances Yad Vashem by promoting an ethos of liberal-democratic individualism through its design,

⁶ Hebrew: “The Ghetto Fighters”

⁷ The museum’s full name is The Ghetto Fighters’ House – Itzhak Katzenelson Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Heritage Museum. Katzenelson was an influential Jewish educator who participated in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

⁸ The museum’s definition of “resistance” encompasses physical, spiritual, and symbolic resistance.

teaching philosophy, and educational programs. In doing so, it strives to realize the balance between communitarian and liberal democratic values that is clearly present in the state's Declaration of Independence, but that is lacking in modern-day Israeli society. Given the importance of Holocaust education and commemoration in Israel, its work is absolutely crucial if Israel is to maintain its dualistic commitments to individual and collective rights. Before learning about the museum itself, however, one must first understand the historic context upon which it was founded.

Historical Background

The story of the ghetto fighters began in the summer of 1942. Between July and September of that year, Nazi forces executed a campaign of mass deportation and murder of the Jews living in the Warsaw ghetto. During those three months, over 250,000 Jews were sent to Treblinka, a Nazi extermination camp. Another 11,580 were deported to labor camps throughout Poland and over 10,000 Jews never left the ghetto alive.

Following the deportations and killings, several Jewish underground resistance groups coalesced into what became known as the Jewish Fighting Organization (*Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa*; Z.O.B.). Around this same period, the Revisionist Party, an organization of right-wing Zionists, formed the Jewish Military Union (*Zydowski Związek Wojskowy*; Z.Z.W.). Despite tensions between them, the two groups worked together and supported nearly 750 Jewish resistance fighters. The Z.O.B. made contact with the Polish military underground movement in October, 1942, and obtained a limited number of small arms.

In January, 1943, the Nazis intended to resume their deportation campaign, but

their efforts were halted a few days later when a small group of armed Jewish fighters launched a surprise attack against the German ranks. The attack disoriented the Nazi forces and caused them to suspend the deportations. Encouraged by the success of the attack, the Jewish resistance groups began building subterranean tunnels and bunkers in preparation for a large-scale uprising. They planned to carry out their insurgency when the final orders were given to deport all of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto.

These orders came on April 19, 1943, the eve of Passover. Led by Z.O.B. commander Mordecai Anielewicz and armed with only pistols, grenades (many of which were hand-made), and a few automatic rifles, the Jewish resistance fighters initiated their uprising ("Warsaw Ghetto Uprising"). Yitzhak "Antek" Zuckerman and Zivia Lubetkin (two resistance fighters who would later play a key role in founding the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum and the kibbutz on which it is located), fought in the Z.O.B. as deputy commanders to Anielewicz. When Anielewicz was killed, Zuckerman took command of the insurgency. He and the remaining ghetto fighters fought until the uprising was finally crushed nearly a month after its inception. Before they could be taken as prisoners, however, Zuckerman and the surviving insurgents escaped through the sewers to the Aryan side of Warsaw. After secretly leaving the city and uniting with Polish partisan units in the forests, Zuckerman and the rest of his partisans continued their fight against Nazi forces. In August 1944, Zuckerman and Lubetkin returned to Warsaw, only this time as the commanders of the Jewish Brigade during the Polish Warsaw Uprising. After the city had been completely razed, the insurgents returned yet again to the woods to fight until the end of the war (Young 238).

When the war finally ended, many of the ghetto fighters immigrated to Mandate

Palestine. In 1947, Lubetkin, Zuckerman, and another 70 former fighters, partisans, and survivors founded Kibbutz Lohamei Haghetat.⁹ Two years later, they founded the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, which at that time was little more than a hut on the kibbutz (Young 238).

Not only is it important to understand the historic narrative of the ghetto fighters, but it is also essential to consider the impact that their heroic story had on the identity and self-image of the Yishuv¹⁰ and later on the Israeli psyche. Although the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was an indisputable military defeat for the Jewish resistance in that it failed to achieve its objective of halting the deportations, it was a symbolic victory for the Zionist movement. It provided an explicit modern-day narrative of Jewish heroism, self-sacrifice, and bravery that could inspire generations of future Israeli warriors. The story of the ghetto fighters found a receptive audience in the Yishuv since many (but certainly not all) of the Jews who had immigrated to Mandate Palestine were ideologically driven by their Zionist beliefs. Both the Zionist pioneers and the ghetto fighters were “brothers in arms” in the struggle of Jewish national liberation. Moreover, both were ideologically committed to the notion of rebellion. In deciding to live in the Biblical lands of the

⁹ The history of the kibbutz's name reveals how complicated Israel's relationship is to the Holocaust and to the displacement of the region's indigenous Arab populations. Segev claims that "there is no settlement in Israel that better illuminates the link between the Holocaust and the Palestinian tragedy" (451) than Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot. Yitzhak Tabenkin, the leader of the kibbutz group, originally wanted to name the settlement Vilna in commemoration of the Jewish ghetto in the Nazi-occupied city of Vilnius (in present-day Lithuania). Zuckerman and several other group members opposed the idea and wanted to preserve the name of the Arab village that once stood where settlers established the kibbutz. They came up with the name Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot Samariah. The Jewish National Fund, however, rejected the idea of connecting the ghetto fighters with the memory of Samariah. Instead, it suggested that the kibbutz be called Asher in honor of the Israelite tribe that had lived in the region during ancient times. Not satisfied with the J.N.F.'s suggestion, the settlers developed a compromise. They dropped the reference to the Arab village, but refused to let go of the reference to the ghetto fighters since so many of the kibbutz's founders had fought in the Warsaw uprising. The J.N.F. still objected claiming that it was unthinkable to use the word "ghetto" in connection with an Israeli settlement, but the name remained nevertheless (Segev 451).

¹⁰ The Hebrew term referring to the pre-state Jewish community in Mandate Palestine.

Jewish people, Zionist pioneers actively rebelled against a nearly 2,000 year-old condition of statelessness, persecution, and powerlessness that had become such a fundamental component to Jewish identity in the Diaspora. It should come as no surprise, then, that the overwhelming majority of Zionist settlers identified deeply with the action-oriented ghetto fighters who rebelled, first and foremost, against the self-image of the Jew as the weak, defenseless, and eternal victim of history.

The founders of the state appropriated the story of the ghetto fighters and canonized it within the country's emerging civil religion in order to help propagate a collective ethos of bravery, self-sacrifice, and armed resistance (Auron 26). Furthermore, many religious and secular Israelis interpreted the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as a modern-day representation of the story of David and Goliath, the prototypical narrative of Jewish heroism. The ghetto fighters seemingly embodied some mystical quality that linked them directly to the fearless Israelite warriors of antiquity. This association was an effective means of bypassing nearly two millennia of what many Israelis saw as a shameful existence in the Diaspora. In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, Israeli society celebrated and regarded the ghetto fighters as national heroes, while it simultaneously marginalized and stigmatized the vast majority of Holocaust survivors living in Israel because they had gone, as the common saying went, "like sheep to the slaughter." With time, the story of the ghetto fighters not only achieved mythical status in Israeli society's collective memory, but also became internalized in the psyche of the strong and confident Israeli "sabra"¹¹ who represented a radical departure from the

¹¹ In Hebrew, the term "sabra" refers to a cactus fruit endemic to the region. The term, however, was culturally popularized to describe the native born Israeli Jew who, like the fruit itself, was perceived to be harsh and abrasive on the surface, but sweet and soft on the inside.

supposedly weak, passive, and persecuted Diaspora Jew.

These were the historic, social, and psychological foundations upon which both the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum and Yad Vashem were initially constructed, the former in 1949 and the latter in 1953. However, it is important to keep in mind that although Yad Vashem was formally established in the early 1950s, its historic museum was not opened to the public until 1973 (Young 250). During those two intermediary decades, several historic events took place that changed Israeli society's attitude toward the Holocaust and its survivors. One of the most important of such events was the capture, trial, and hanging of Adolf Eichmann in 1960-1961. Eichmann was a top leader in the Nazi party and was in charge of organizing the deportation of Jews to extermination camps throughout Europe. His trial was held in Jerusalem in 1961 and was broadcast live on national television. The Eichmann trial was a watershed event in Israeli society because it forced native-born Israelis to publicly discuss the significance of the Holocaust. Consequently, many began to renegotiate their relationship with and attitudes toward the marginalized Holocaust survivors (Aron 20).

The Yom Kippur War (1973) was another landmark event that drastically shifted attitudes in Israel toward the Holocaust. On the holiest day in the Jewish tradition, Israelis were caught off guard by a coordinated surprise attack by Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian forces. The first few days of fighting saw terribly high Israeli casualty rates. Many soldiers felt powerless and did all they could simply to stay alive from one moment to the next. Although the country was able to successfully defend itself, Israelis gained "a greater, retrospective understanding of the need to survive...not through fighting or sacrifice" (Bar-on 14, "Others"). From that point on, many Israelis relinquished the guilt

and shame they felt toward Holocaust survivors who remembered all too well the same feelings of humiliation and helplessness that the soldiers experienced. As a result of the Eichmann trial and the Yom Kippur War, Yad Vashem gained a much more central role in Israeli society, thereby pushing the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum further into the peripheries of Israeli society.

Despite its marginalization, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum has continued to grow and develop. What started out as a small house on the kibbutz has gradually expanded into a respectable museum that includes sixteen exhibit halls, a separate children's museum (*Yad LaYeled*), and the Center for Humanistic Education. As a whole the museum sees itself as "an integral part of the rich socio-cultural fabric of the State of Israel and the Western Galilee" ("The GFH Museum"). Like Yad Vashem, one of the museum's central purposes is to tell "the story of the Jewish People in the 20th century in general, and during the Second World War in particular" ("The GFH Museum"). Yet what makes the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum so extraordinary as an Israeli Holocaust museum is that its *modus operandi* is deeply rooted in liberal-democratic values that render the individual as a unique agent that must respect and be respected as such. If Yad Vashem uses the narrative of the Holocaust to bind Jews to a shared and common history, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum strives to use that same historic framework in order to loosen those bonds and thus realize the balanced tension between communal and individual rights that was carefully articulated in the state's Declaration of Independence.

Theoretical Framework: Individualism and Liberal-Democratic Values

In order to understand the subtle ways in which the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum promotes an ethos of liberalism, one must become familiar with the tenants of liberalism and its rendering of the individual as an autonomous being that is both a part of a collective, yet distinguishable from it. At the heart of classical liberalism rests a strongly individualistic conception of the self that emerged out of humanist Renaissance thinking (Moseley 99). As a political principle in the Western tradition, individualism can be traced back to John Locke's proposing of natural rights as a counter-argument to the belief in the divine rights of kings. The argument was that if people were given inalienable rights by their Creator, then there would be no way for a state authority (be it a king, a duke, or a religious figure, for example) to use his governing powers to oppress the people and infringe upon their rights (Harik 128).

One of the most important features of liberalism is that it renders each individual as an autonomous agent capable of "author[ing]" (Ezrahi 124) his/her own future. Moseley notes that classical liberalism is founded upon the principles that "all men are born morally equal" (101) and that the individual is entitled to live freely without the state's interference into his/her private life (97). Moreover, classical liberalism regards a community as an aggregate of individuals, all of whom are autonomous, rational beings capable of thinking and making reasonable judgments for themselves (Dauenhauer 104).

In addition to acknowledging the autonomy of each individual, liberalism defends the notion that each individual has special, intrinsic value (Dauenhauer 102; Ezrahi 59). Recognizing the inherent value of each individual not only honors the equality and dignity of each person, but also casts each loss of life as irreplaceable. Since every

individual embodies a novel blend of thoughts, feelings, memories, and experiences, death is seen as nothing more than an irretrievable loss of an entirely unique person (Ezrahi 240). Subsequently, when engaged in conflict over, say, land or political power, the democratic individualist will consider the fact that territory and power can change hands many times over, whereas the individual and all-too-mortal self can die once and only once (Ezrahi 254). That said, by placing so much inherent value on the individual, the family, and the private home, liberalism severely undermines the state's ability to use the rhetoric of war to convince its citizens of an age-old claim: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*.¹²

Liberalism places special emphasis on the autonomous and rational nature of the individual since it contends that “to live well...is to make personal choices” (Walzer cited in Dauenhauer 104). This capacity to choose freely among many diverse (and potentially competing) options is what ensures individual autonomy. Consequently, liberalism holds that political institutions must be committed solely to protecting the liberties of each individual (Avineri 9). This implies that such institutions should not, *ceteris paribus*, limit the number of options available for their citizens and should remain impartial and fair by not interfering in the social order to favor any one particular option over another (Dauenhauer 102). A liberal state, then, comes to be set apart from other societies by adhering to the liberal tenant that “the right [of the individual] is prior to the [common] good” (Sandel 13) of the collective. Furthermore, a liberal state distinguishes itself in the

¹² A phrase coined by the Roman poet Horace. Roughly translated, it means: “How sweet and fitting it is to die for one’s country.” It is noteworthy to add that Joseph Trumpedor was rumored to have uttered a strikingly similar phrase upon his death in 1920. Trumpedor, a Zionist activist and a member of a Jewish defense organization, was mortally wounded during a confrontation between Jewish settlers and Arab villagers at Tel Hai (a Jewish settlement in the north of Israel). Soon after his death, he became a national hero for the Zionist movement.

way that it respects the rights of minority groups and upholds the integrity of non-mainstream viewpoints by not engaging in discriminatory practices that privilege one group of people or one particular perspective over another (Iram 219).

It is also important to add that democratic individualism accounts for the fact that different people may interpret different events in very distinct ways.¹³ It acknowledges that each person perceives the world through a unique prism that is constructed by their past experiences and their future expectations. Therefore, this multiplicity of perspectives "undermines the mobilizing power and authority of any single master narrative and upholds the status of the individual as a free agency who will make choices from among alternative forms of life" (Ezrahi 94).

Democratic individualism stresses the complexity and profundity of each individual life, potentially transforming it into a narrative that can stand apart from an overarching meta-narrative and still retain its meaning (Ezrahi 80). This implies that the individual is not simply a cog in the wheel of some larger and inherently more meaningful system. Rather, the individual is meaningful in that s/he is the basic building-block from which the polity is derivative (Ezrahi 78).

Furthermore, democratic individualism often emphasizes the present over the past and the future. Although both the past and the future are important (seeing as how one's past experiences and future expectations influence his/her behavior in the present), it is

¹³ A useful analogy to understand this comes from literary theory. Reader-response criticism maintains that when people read a work of literature, they may understand the same underlying narrative, but more often than not, they walk away from the literary work with different interpretations because what each reader brings to the novel, dramatic text, or poem in terms of previous experiences, memories, or knowledge is absolutely unique. I would add that the way in which we read into history or even the way we perceive events in the present is not unlike the way in which we use our cognitive skills to interpret literary works. For a more in-depth survey of reader-response criticism, see Steven Lynn's *Texts and Contexts: Writing About Literature with Critical Theory*. New York: Longman, 2004.

the present that bestows upon the individual the greatest sense of agency (Ezrahi 86). Someone who perceives him/herself as living in a continually unfolding present can potentially become an agent of change capable of envisioning and constructing a future that is different from the past and one that is tailored to his/her desires. Individualists do not see themselves as merely a link in a chain extending infinitely from the past into the future. Rather, they see themselves, in the words of English poet Arthur O'Shaughnessy, as "music makers" ("Ode") operating within a structure of scales and progressions, yet living from one transient and improvised note to the next.

Perhaps the most important component of liberalism for this analysis is the central role that dialogue plays in a liberal educational system. It is difficult to overestimate the importance that liberalism places on free deliberation among varying viewpoints and perspectives. Liberal democracies require that educators "uphold the principle of nonrepression by cultivating the capacity for democratic deliberation" (Gutmann 76). Being entitled to one's own private views and having the freedom to express them freely in an educational discourse is a hallmark of liberalism that seeks to replace the exchange of gunfire with the exchange of words and ideas.

It is from within this framework of liberal-democratic values that the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum employs a narrative of Jewish heroism and resistance as a foundation upon which to "intensify [Israel's] commitment to the values of liberty, human dignity, tolerance, and democracy" ("The GFH Mission"). At first glance, this may not seem particularly unusual. However, the museum's uniqueness becomes clear when one considers its purpose of promoting liberal democratic values within the context of the dense collective Jewish identity that Yad Vashem has constantly fomented since its

inception. The Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, then, is by no means just another memorial to commemorate the greatest tragedy to befall the Jewish people. Rather, it is a civic center that uses the historic narrative of the Holocaust in general and the ghetto fighters in particular as vehicles to support the state's commitments to liberal democratic values. Its architectural design, teaching philosophy, and educational programs were all intentionally cast out of the mold of democratic individualism as a way of bringing the lessons of the past into the present in order to empower the individual self rather than binding the individual in the present to the collective trauma of the past.

The Ghetto Fighters' House Museum

The museum's physical lay-out plays an important role in the way in which it strives to cultivate an ethos of democratic individualism. Unlike Yad Vashem, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum organizes its exhibits thematically rather than chronologically.¹⁴ In doing so, the museum renders each individual visitor as the architect of his/her own educational experience. Visitors are not restricted to following a pre-determined route throughout the museum. They can, for instance, just as easily start their journey in the art galleries on the third level as they can in the Hall of Remembrance on the lower level. This means that there is no single, correct, or "official" way to go through the museum. Tamir Porter, the museum's Director of Overseas Departments, stated that "the museum invites you and doesn't lead you. It gives you the *choice* where to

¹⁴ The Ghetto Fighters' House Museum gives itself such liberties primarily because it does not consider itself to be a comprehensive museum in terms of Holocaust history. Its scope is much too focused to give justice to the enormity and complexity of the Holocaust. Mr. Porter himself acknowledged this by stating that "it's not about learning the history here because history and the Holocaust [the students] can learn in school. If they come to a museum, first of all, they want to experience...something that is different from school" (interview).

go physically” (interview). It can therefore be said that the museum’s layout creates a “decentralized, democratic, or laissez-faire [system that] favor[s] individualism” (Triandis and Trafimow 271).

Although the museum is indeed supported by Israel's Ministry of Education,¹⁵ the authority of the visitor trumps that of the state's since it is not the state, per se, that is guiding visitors, but rather it is the individual visitor who is making the "personal decision [on] what to remember, how to move throughout the room[s], and with whom to identify" (Ronen, “The Ghetto Fighters' House Museum”). Such freedom of choice serves to empower the individual self and render it as an agent of change. The ghetto fighters and many other Jews who lived in the Warsaw ghetto made the conscious and active choice to resist Nazi brutalities exactly because they felt an empowered to do so. Analogously, the museum’s structure puts visitors in a position where they see themselves not only as the agents of their own educational experience, but, indirectly, also as agents capable of standing apart from the crowd in order to denounce and resist the forces of systematic prejudice that always lurk behind acts of genocide.

Perhaps the most important consequence resulting from the museum’s decentralized layout and thematic organization is the central role that open discussions play in each visitor's educational experience. Mr. Porter noted that “each exhibit is not just an exhibit in itself; it is also a place for discussion” (interview). When museum guides address their groups, they are not “just talking about...the chronology of the extermination” (Porter, interview). Rather, they oftentimes expand the conversation to

¹⁵ The Ministry of Education supports all museums in Israel to varying degrees. An interesting question to investigate would be how much money and resources the Ministry of Education allocates to both Yad Vashem and the Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum.

include much broader topics including human and civil rights, human dignity, leadership, humanistic values, and the central role that prejudice and discrimination played in setting off a cataclysmic chain of events leading to the calculated extermination of the Jews. The content of such discussions is an invaluable part of each visitor's experience at the museum. However, what is equally important is the visitor's freedom to express his/her views in such open forums that provide each visitor with a private voice within a public discourse. This may not seem so significant to an American readership, but one must keep in mind that when dealing with the Holocaust, private voices are seldom heard in Israeli society since hegemonic institutions like Yad Vashem have been effectively conducting a single, unified, harmonic, yet morosely somber, anthem regarding its lessons for the Jewish people.

In addition to the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum's layout, the images that its curators chose to display also seem to protect the individual self from prejudicial attitudes that deny people their individuality by stripping them of their personal identities. The museum does so by deliberately limiting the number of graphic images it displays of Nazis murdering Jews. Out of the museum's sixteen exhibit halls, only two are devoted to the killing of Jews. Additionally, the Nazis' atrocities are presented indirectly through models of Treblinka and Vapniarka work camps and through S.S. uniforms. Although graphic pictures do exist in the museum, their numbers are surprisingly low given the horrific nature of the subject and they are generally not the central focus of the exhibit.

In contrast, Yad Vashem seeks to "document the horrors [of the Holocaust] through visualization; it concentrate[s] mainly on aspects that [are] expected to cause emotional turmoil, thus increasing the 'traumatizing' aspect of the Holocaust" (Gross 98).



As Segev observes, the "photographs...are meant to rouse the viewers to compassion, identification, and revulsion, all at the same time" (423). If one were to visit Yad Vashem's historical museum today, s/he would find haunting images like the one above in several of the museum's most central exhibits. The museum has enlarged this particular photograph, which was originally small enough to fit inside an envelope, to nearly life-sized proportions. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the museum's exact motives for doing so, the psychological effects that the photograph has on visitor are tremendous. The re-scaled image instantly transforms viewers into bystanders (*not* agents) as it ruptures the psychological barrier between subject and object. If the image speaks for itself, it says nothing about the years of dehumanizing propaganda and institutionalized racism that were needed to lay down the socio-psychological foundations necessary to bring about the "Final Solution."

One could argue, in fact, that such images undermine the museum's preceding exhibits which describe the gradual changes in German society that transformed the Jew from a citizen into a social disease. In an ironic twist of fate, it is now the *viewer* who falls victim to the hands of prejudice by perceiving the German as inherently evil,

immoral, and subhuman. Considering that the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum was founded by Holocaust survivors who were first-hand witnesses of the Holocaust's horrors, it is astounding that the museum curators chose to minimize the number of such "secular icons" (Hansen-Glucklich 211) they wanted to publicly display. Perhaps they understood that such iconic images simultaneously disturb the viewer and create "the illusion of a facile grasp of complicated events, leading to an elision of the past in favor of easily accessible symbols" (Hansen-Glucklich 211) that reduce complex human beings to one-dimensional stock characters.

Furthermore, by not exhibiting so many explicit depictions of death, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum is actually counteracting people's natural tendency to seek increased group cohesion when reminded of death. Ongoing research in the field of Terror Management Theory suggests that when people are exposed to images of death (or, better yet, images that remind them of their own mortality), one effect is that they adhere drastically more to the social groups with which they identify.¹⁶ Additionally, by not emotionally overwhelming the visitor (particularly the Jewish-Israeli visitor) with horrendous photographs of victims and victimizers, the museum tries to provide a stable ground upon which visitors can stand and make critical, thoughtful, and independent judgments regarding the history and the modern-day implications of the Holocaust without being totally engulfed in an emotional catharsis. To a certain extent, then, the museum was designed as a kind of refuge to help save the Jewish-Israeli self from listening to the siren's song of victimization, hatred, and revenge that is silently sung by

¹⁶ For an excellent overview of the psychological effects of mortality salience, see Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg's *In The Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003.

images, like the one above, that bind the individual Jewish viewer to the collective consciousness of the Holocaust.

Yad LaYeled

The spirit of individualism exists not only in the main museum, but also in the nearby and recently-built children's museum. Yad LaYeled opened in 1995 and soon became "a place where children could meet and talk about the Holocaust freely" (Shachar, interview). The museum was designed for younger audiences and tells the story of the Holocaust through the experiences of Jewish children. While Yad Vashem does house an astonishing memorial dedicated to the one and a half million children who died during the Holocaust, it does not have an educational center *specifically* designed for younger visitors. Its International School for Holocaust Studies offers seminars addressing discrimination, racism, and anti-Semitism, but they are geared more towards middle and high school students. Furthermore, children under the age of ten are not allowed into Yad Vashem's historical museum (Silberklang, interview). Most children, then, are left to learn about the Holocaust through their parents, grandparents, teachers, or other authority figures. What is so interesting about Yad LaYeled is that it deliberately attempts to break down this distance between "the experts" and the learners. As both a memorial and an educational center, Yad LaYeled affords children the opportunity decide *for themselves* the extent to which they will learn about and relate to Jewish children during the Holocaust in particular and the Holocaust itself in general. At its core, Yad LaYeled plants the seeds of democratic individualism in minds of these young children who will one day be the ones shaping the way in which Israeli society learns about and

commemorates the Holocaust.

Even before entering Yad LaYeled, one is struck by its contemporary design, which seems strangely anachronistic when compared to the nearby Ottoman-era aqueduct and the classical Greek amphitheater. The museum's curious design is by no means accidental and indeed serves the museum's teaching philosophy. World-renown Israeli architect Ram Karmi intentionally designed the museum to look like a sandcastle pointing toward the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁷ The logic behind designing the museum in such a way was to create an inviting space where children could feel comfortable exploring the museum's age-sensitive exhibits, participating in its workshops, and discussing their experiences with their peers, parents, and educators.

In terms of its design, the museum was also built so that natural light would filter down to even its very lowest levels. On a figurative level, the rays of natural light serve as a symbol of hope and life in the museum. However, as Mrs. Shachar pointed out, they also represent a sort of lifeline, bringing the children back to the present day once they have (literally and figuratively) descended down through its lowly-lit historical exhibits. Even while they walk through dioramas of an abandoned ghetto, hearing voice recordings of what happened "over there," the beams of light have the potential to make students aware of the inseparable nature between past and present, "there" (Europe) and "here" (Israel). By using natural light to draw the connection between "there" and "here," the museum allows people to visually conceptualize that an absolute separation between the two really does not exist. Oftentimes, such a separation is a psychological defense

¹⁷ Karmi also designed the building in Jerusalem that houses the Israeli Supreme Court. The Supreme Court is perhaps the most widely recognized symbol of the state's commitment to liberal-democratic values.

mechanism that protects people from the unsettling thought that what happened to “them, over there” could also happen to “us, over here.” These beams of light, in other words, democratize some of the darkest and most deeply-rooted aspects of human nature. The Jews of Europe “weren't *just* victims” (Shachar, interview). Rather:

[They] were living in democratic societies. [They] had full rights. And [what happened during the Holocaust] could happen to any citizen of any democratic state...and you always have to be aware of the signs. The first signs. The early signs. When your rights are taken away. (Shachar, interview)

Prejudice, systematic discrimination, and dehumanization are not inexplicable phenomena that reside solely within the safe confines of a dark and distant past. They are alive and are very much a part of the human condition. Acknowledging their universality across time and space is arguably the first step in providing each individual with the mental resources to fight against them.¹⁸

One of the ways in which individuals can begin to combat prejudicial attitudes is by respecting others. Having an open and free discourse in which each individual has the right to participate and express his/her own particular views is perhaps one of the most basic ways of engendering mutual respect. The museum's sandcastle appearance, its stained glass windows,¹⁹ and its use of natural light “are all doors that open the dialogue” (Shachar, interview). Throughout the museum, there are several forum spaces where museum guides can hold group discussions that afford students the opportunity to process

¹⁸ One may be skeptical at this point and ask whether young audiences will actually make the connection between rays of light and democratizing prejudicial tendencies. Such a claim is quite valid, but I would add that one must also consider the developmental process students go through after visiting the museum a second, a third, or even a fourth time. The museum is a powerful learning tool exactly because students can return and make connections that they had not made during previous visits.

¹⁹ The museum's stained glass windows display artwork from children who had been interned in concentration camps.

through their own thoughts and feelings by listening to those of other students. These discussions are so central to the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum overall mission of promoting liberal democratic values through Holocaust education because they help even the youngest of learners understand that each individual is entitled to his/her personal views, which may or may not coincide with the dominant viewpoint. Rather than using shocking photographs or a carefully choreographed floor plan aimed at eliciting very specific emotional responses from visitors, Yad LaYeled uses open and free deliberation as its most powerful tool to get Jewish-Israeli students to realize that their country is one that entitles them to have a personal voice and an individual identity that are both as equally important as an overarching Jewish collective identity.

Central to these discussions is the fact that young audiences are encouraged to explore the museum for themselves. Even elementary school students can have an interactive educational experience about the Holocaust that is not necessarily mediated through the presence of an authority figure, be it a parent, educator, or tour guide. Moreover, the museum's exhibits were designed in such a way that children can explore them without running the risk of being exposed to traumatizing images. Having worked for several years as a facilitator at Yad LaYeled, Mrs. Shachar said that museum guides "really have to give [children] the space and believe that kids can...read the museum, without having to tell them what to do" (interview). This hands-off teaching approach engenders a sense of personal responsibility, which, in the long-term, is crucial for people to maintain if they are to continue living in a democratic society that puts the welfare of the individual at the core of its existence.

Michael's Dialogue

In addition to organizing tours to its main museum and its children's museum, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum is currently at the forefront of exploring a new frontier in Holocaust education. Using online forums, the museum has been able to put Israeli and German high school students in contact with one another in order to get them to share their thought and feelings regarding the Holocaust.²⁰ This is how a program called Michael's Dialogue came to be.²¹

At its most fundamental level, Michael's Dialogue is an effort to democratize and humanize both the decision-making and socialization processes that lead one group to detest the other. Tanja Ronen, Director of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum's Europe Desk and one of the overseers of Michael's Dialogue, elaborated on this point by saying that "the same decisions we make today were made a hundred years ago as well. And because of the same dangers, nothing [has] changed. We're still human beings" (interview). Michael's Dialogue seeks to bring down the barriers between past versus present, "here" versus "there," and "us" versus "them." In addition to bringing students together to interact with one another on an interpersonal level, the program helps both Israeli and German students to come to terms with their own identities²² and recognize that the same breakdown of humanity that took place in Germany during World War II

²⁰ The Janusz Korczak International School at the Ghetto Fighters House' Museum organizes a similar program called the International Book-Sharing Project, in which Israeli and American middle school students and educators use the Internet to communicate with one another in an effort to study the Holocaust within a multi-cultural framework. It would be valuable to investigate whether Israeli students who study the Holocaust in collaboration with American students come away with a greater appreciation for liberal-democratic values than Israeli students who study the Holocaust solely within their own cultural context.

²¹ It was developed in memory of Michael Bloch, a German-born Israeli who spent the last years of his life volunteering at the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum. His lifetime goal had been to foster meaningful dialogue between Israelis and Germans. Soon after his death, Mr. Bloch's wife and his three children began collaborating with the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum and the Blue House organization in Breisach,

could take place among any people at any time in history. One of the program's central messages, it seems, is that one of the most basic ways to prevent such a catastrophe from occurring again is to protect the sanctity of the individual self and to empower people to take a stand against prejudicial attitudes and behaviors that so easily strip people of their individuality. A future free of genocide depends on the ability of individuals who see themselves as self-determined agent accountable for their actions and inactions in first recognizing where prejudice exists and then making the conscious choice resist its deadly and dehumanizing grip.

Although Michael's Dialogue was developed primarily to serve as a cultural interface between Israeli and German students, it was also developed with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in mind. Despite its length, it is worth including the following quote because it places the significance and impact of this program on a historic continuum that stretches from Europe in the 1940s to modern-day Israel:

Michael's Dialogue is influenced by two main narratives: the Jewish and German ethos of the Holocaust, on the one hand, and the long and deep national conflict between the Jews and the Palestinian Arabs, on the other. These two narratives influence each other profoundly. They shape the memories of past traumas, experienced by the collectives, namely the Jewish Holocaust, [Nazi Germany defeat] and the Palestinian Nakba. These are formative traumatic events which are rooted deeply in the collective narratives of the nations, and have a deep impact on their perceptions and behaviour - today and in the future. Michael's Dialogue deals with the narratives with the aim of creating constructive feelings and actions among its participants.

To date, there has been one successful pilot program, which took place between 2006 and 2007.²³ Initially, fourteen German and fourteen Israeli high school students

Germany to make Michael Bloch's dream a reality.

²² Which are undoubtedly influenced by their respective country's collective memory of the Holocaust

²³ Due to lack of financial support, the program has been temporarily suspended.

communicated with one another on a secured online forum. The students were almost entirely in control of the questions and comments they raised and their discussions were not limited to any kind of fixed state-curriculum. Additionally, the Israeli and German educators who oversaw the forum were, more than anything else, facilitators in the conversation. This hands-off, non-preaching approach undoubtedly allowed students from both countries to develop their own personal understanding of “the Other.” Ms. Ronen was astounded by what the participants “wrote...about prejudice, about understanding a lot of human behavior. [The program] chang[ed] the whole concept of what Germans are, and for the Germans, of course, the other way” (interview).

After several months of dialogue, the administrators decided to organize a face-to-face meeting between the two groups of students. The two groups first met in Germany around January 27th, 2007. The date was intentionally selected because it gave the Israeli students an opportunity to see how their German peers commemorated the Holocaust during the International Memorial Day for the Holocaust. In April of that same year, the German students visited Israel for another group visit. Again, the date was set on purpose as it coincided with Yom Hashoah, Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Besides the actual interactions between the two groups of students, the most important component of the program is the family research that students on both sides of the dialogue must do. This family research is so critical because it allows students to see that “collective narratives are a quilt of individual testimonies and [that therein] lies their historical, moral and social value” (Marzinka). By researching the history of their grandparents or great-grandparents, students become much more empathetic to the decisions they took and the impacts that their decisions had on the lives of others.

Throughout the program, the students' perceptions of history and the Holocaust also begin to change. Whereas many initially think of the Holocaust in terms of broad, sweeping generalizations, that, for example, pit German against Jew, aggressor against victim, evil against good, participants on both sides eventually come to understand that beneath all those loaded words, images, and stereotypes lived individuals who were every bit as human as they themselves. It is at this point that participants truly begin to realize that behind all historic and social narratives are individuals who, for better or for worse, are capable of impacting the lives of others. Michael's Dialogue, then, brings the past into the present in order to get Jewish-Israeli and German students to understand that they themselves are the ones responsible for creating a future where they can look into the eyes of "the Other" and see that they too are human beings who deserve to be respected as such.

The Center for Humanistic Education

The Center for Humanistic Education offers perhaps the clearest examples of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum's commitment to liberal-democratic values. Raya Kalisman, the founder and director of the center, writes:

Humanism places the person, as a rational-moral human being, at the center of social existence. Democracy places the commitment to human rights at the top of its social scale of values. We [at the Center of Humanistic Education] believe that the Holocaust became possible when these two foundations of modern civilization broke down. (Kalisman 2)

Although the center operates separately from the museum itself, it is still an integral part of the museum. Established in 1995, the center has been organizing ongoing workshops and seminars dealing with tolerance and co-existence for Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Druze students and educators from the Galilee region in the north of Israel. The Center's

objective is to use workshops and seminars to create "a multicultural framework that provides the opportunity for pluralistic dialogue" (Kalisman 2) among these various populations.

The Center's basic workshop is entirely voluntary and consists of twelve weekly meetings. From October 2009 to April 2010, approximately 350 Arab and Jewish students from 22 different schools participated in the basic workshop. The Center also conducts three-day seminars during students' spring and summer vacations. These seminars are intended to get participants to talk to one another about topics related to identity, racism, human rights, and majority-minority relations between Israelis and Palestinians. In March and April 2010, the Center hosted two sessions of the Spring Seminar, which saw a total of around 230 participants (Kalisman 3). Although the workshops seminars are conducted in group settings, their purpose is to have an impact on the individual so that s/he will feel enabled to have an impact on his/her social environment (Nezer 235). A Jewish female who completed the series of basic workshops reported the following: "Maybe I can't change the world - but I can change my environment: I take that from [the Center of Humanistic Education]" (Nezer 201).

Additionally, the center's seminars and workshops accomplish three important goals. For one, they promote an awareness of "the Other's" narrative. Much of this entails learning about the trauma that both Jews and Arabs have endured in the recent past. Second, it allows Jews, Arabs, and Druze to interact with one another on a one-on-one basis. Finally, the seminars create a super-ordinate in-group in which students begin to perceive "us" as all those who have participated in the Center's workshops and "them" as those who have not (Nezer 241-242).

Interestingly, however, as students become more familiar with “the Other’s” narrative, their own personal identities can potentially become more well-defined. A female Muslim student wrote the following after her group saw a play performed by an Arab actor about Israel’s War of Independence in 1948:

After the play there was a deep and painful discussion. It then hit me that I’ve never took interest in my own history, my parents never opened it up, at school it was never dealt with. It was silenced, hidden. I was shocked with myself: Here I am learning about my neighbors' story - and ignoring my own...I began to inquire about my family's history, and the history of my village. Thanks to a program that started off with the Holocaust - I came to my roots, as an Arab...I believe now that true dialogue is an exchange of personal stories. (Nezer 202)

This young woman’s reflection highlights just how intertwined Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian identities have become after coexisting in the same geo-political territory for generations. Although years of violence and animosity have polarized Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian collective identities, the Center for Humanistic Education is slowly working to promote a social environment where fluid and multi-faceted individual identities become more salient than rigid and monolithic collective identities that so often seem to depersonalize, if not dehumanize, “the Other.”

The Center uses three levels, or “circles,” to promote the sort of dialogue that the female Muslim student refers to in her reflection. First is an inner circle, which requires workshop participants to have an internal dialogue that tries to make sense of the various facets of their personal identity. Next is an intra-group dialogue in which each person in the group is encouraged to share his/her opinions freely during the workshop activities. The final, most difficult dialogue to negotiate is the inter-group dialogue, which focuses on getting participants to think about their personal identity with respect to their collective identity (Kalisman 2). At this point, an Arab Christian student who lives in

Israel, for example, might wonder what it means for him hear the siren that goes off every year on Yom HaShoah that commemorates the six million Jews who perished during the Holocaust.²⁴ A female Jewish student might question what it means for her to be a secular atheist living in a country that requires all students (regardless of their private beliefs) to pass a matriculation exam in religious scripture. These are immensely difficult questions to answer, but they engender a process of inter- and intra-personal dialogue that gets students thinking about who they are as individuals in the context of the social environment in which they live.

Most important to all of this is the central role that the individual self plays in the dialogue process. Students are first made aware of their own unique personal identities. By setting this as the first stage, the Center allows students to distinguish themselves as individuals so that they will not strictly adhere to their group identities when the time comes for them to interact with other students from different ethnic or religious backgrounds. Furthermore, this is an important way in which the Center tries to guard against prejudicial attitudes toward the out-group and favoritism toward the in-group. The workshops emphasize that people's personal identities are incredibly multifaceted and are not simply small-scale representations of their collective identity. One Jewish female participant wrote in a post-seminar reflection that "sometimes [she] found more common ground with some of the Arab counterparts than with some of [her] schoolmates. The national affiliation became meaningless as [they] got to know each other" (Nezer 200). When people distinguish themselves as individuals apart from the collectives with which

²⁴ When the siren sounds throughout the country, people are expected to stop whatever it is they are doing and stand in silence for its duration. Traffic on even the busiest of Israel's highways will come to a halt and people will stand besides their vehicles during this solemnly surreal performative commemoration.

they identify and start to empathize with “the Other” and see him/her as a complex individual as well who is by no means defined solely by his/her collective identity, it seems as though mutual respect and tolerance are possible.

Sadly, however, the words “tolerance” and “mutual respect” fall on deaf ears in a country where there are so many societal pressures to adhere to rigid and fixed collective identities. As “the Jewish people’s living memorial to the Holocaust” (“About Yad Vashem”), Yad Vashem is by no means a marginal figure in propagating a dense collective Jewish identity. In a society as diversified as Israel’s, a carefully balanced interplay between collective and individual identities seem to hold the key to any sort of social stability. Despite its limited size, the impact that the Center for Humanistic Education is having on spreading a culture of democratic individualism in Israel is nevertheless significant. Its advances can perhaps best be captured by the words of the participants themselves. A 20 year-old Arab Christian claimed that after participating in the center’s seminars, he began to “relate to people on an individual basis, regardless of their collective affiliation” (Nezer 203). Similarly, a group of two Muslims and an Arab Christian wrote that “‘Jews’ became Ron, Orna, Gil - nice persons that were happy to see me and I was happy to meet” (Nezer 200).

Conclusion

The Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum is both a museum and an educational center seeking to teach visitors of all ages and backgrounds about the importance of upholding and protecting what lies at the center of liberal-democratic thought: the welfare of the individual. On one hand, its decentralized design, focus on group discussions, and

ambivalence towards displaying graphic depictions of Nazi brutalities are all subtle ways in which the museum tries to mitigate the psychological forces that seem to magnetically pull individual Jews towards the charged collective trauma of the Holocaust. On the other hand, its educational programs, such as Michael's Dialogue and the workshops that the Center for Humanistic Education organizes, put liberal-democratic values into practice in an effort to reconcile past and present traumas through meaningful interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, its educational philosophy embraces liberal democratic values in an attempt to both empower the individual self and hold it accountable for its actions and inactions. Such a sense of personal responsibility is an essential tenant of citizenship. Ethical citizens are those who have been given the capacity to make critical, independent judgments and who understand that citizenship entails the protection of individual citizens from the state's arbitrary use of power (Ichilov 650). They also understand that in order to continue living in a liberal-democratic society, they must dissent and resist state policies that unjustly abuse or oppress specific groups of people.

This has serious implications for a country that, on the one hand, identifies itself as a Jewish state, but that, on the other hand, promises to "ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex" ("The Declaration"). The internal measure of Israel's strength, as outlined in its Declaration of Independence, should not be economic or military power, but rather the extent to which it maintains as strong of a commitment to liberal-democratic values as it does to communitarian values that foster a collective Jewish consciousness. Years of war, nationalistic and religious ideologies, and a culture of collective commemoration of the

Holocaust have understandably led to communitarian values becoming the norm in Israeli society. However, if the state wishes to honor its double promise to uphold both individual and communal rights, one of the most influential ways it can do so is to bring the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum into the mainstream of Holocaust commemoration and education in Israel.

One might argue that there is no longer a need to give the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum a more central role in Israeli society because Yad Vashem has already begun to adopt a culture of individualism into its educational philosophy. Beginning in the 1980s, Yad Vashem became increasingly focused on commemorating the private lives of Jewish Holocaust victims (Gutwein 37). In 1989, for example, it initiated a commemorative ceremony by the name of *Lekol ish yesh shem*²⁵ on Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day. During the ceremony, families gathered on the museum's campus and read aloud the names of family members who had perished in the Holocaust. Additionally, families lit individual candles in memory of their lost relatives. In previous official ceremonies, state dignitaries used to only light six large torches which represented the six million Jewish victims (Gross 100). Although the six large torches are still lit to this day during official ceremonies, their ability to represent all six million victims is undermined by the reading of individual names and the lighting of individual candles. Such a trend of personalizing Holocaust commemoration can best be explained by this quote found on none other than Yad Vashem's website: "As time passes and fewer witnesses remain, it is of great importance to create a personal link between the Jewish people today and those who perished under the Nazi genocidal regime" ("Unto Every Person").

²⁵ Hebrew: "Unto Every Person There Is a Name"

It would be a mistake, however, to think that the culture of individualism that Yad Vashem has adopted is the same as that which the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum has promoted since its founding days. The two are enormously different. One takes the visitor back in time to see that the six million Jewish Holocaust victims were people who led rich, complicated lives that were tragically cut short. The other brings the heroic story of the ghetto fighters into the present so that people can feel empowered to see themselves as "the dreamers of dreams" ("Ode"), as agents capable of producing change and creating a future in which the state lives up to its initial promise of equally valuing the individual voice in addition to the chorus of the collective.

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